

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

**Kevin Colin Parsons (1926-)
Electrical Engineer**

- Birth & Family:** Kevin Parsons was born on the 4th September 1926 in Perth, Western Australia. He had one younger brother, Michael, who was four years his junior and also studied engineering at university. Kevin married Judy Western, a kindergarten teacher from Maitland, in the 1950s and they had three daughters.
- Education:** State School, South Perth.
Wesley College, Prefect and Cadet Lieutenant.
- Qualifications:** BE (Electrical), University of Western Australia, 1951.
Fellow, Institution of Engineers, Australia.
Amateur Radio Operator with an unrestricted license.
- Memberships:** I.E.Aust – Papua New Guinea Branch.
Rotary Club of Sydney.
Regional Air Space Users Advisory Committee – Chairman.
- Work History:** As a youth, Parsons was fascinated by both wireless and aircraft. After graduating from university he obtained a position in the Department of Civil Aviation and was actively involved in aeronautical communications and navigational aids. Parsons believed that much of this work was pioneering, allowing clear, constant, long-range voice contact with AIC and FS staff (*both these abbreviations should be spelt out in full – I don't know what they represent*).
- Fairly soon Parsons was promoted and was given the task of upgrading the air traffic service facilities in NSW, ACT, Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. In 1956 he was promoted to Senior Engineer, in charge of all Sydney based capital works in the communications/navigation area and at this time he was the youngest Senior Engineer in the Department.
- In 1962 he volunteered for a job as Superintending Airways Engineer in Papua New Guinea. After obtaining this position he sold everything in Sydney and moved with his family to Port Moresby for seven years. Parsons says that in some ways this was the happiest and most creative period of his life as there was a great deal of expansion of the aeronautical ground facilities systems occurring and they did some quite novel work in somewhat difficult circumstances. He was also active in the PNG Branch of IE Aust, and was Chairman for a year. During this time he looked after every form of engineering in airports except civil engineering. Parsons recalled that conditions in New Guinea were quite primitive and communications were almost non-existent.
- In 1969 he was transferred to Adelaide as Superintending Airways Engineer of the South Australia – Northern Territory Region. After his counterpart in NSW died suddenly from a heart attack, Parsons was asked to take on this position in Sydney until a replacement could be

found. Although a little reluctant to leave Adelaide for Sydney, even for a brief time, he found himself so caught up in the Sydney lifestyle and working environment that he could not bear to return to Adelaide. During the same time he was promoted to Class 5 Engineer. During this period his branch undertook massive programs to upgrade the Air Traffic Services system which brought them into contact with a large amount of new technology. There was also a large amount of turbulence in the industrial relations area at this time as the trade union movement was at the peak of its influence. These disputes, Parsons said, created bad blood and alienation between many groups that had previously worked together in harmony.

In the late 1970s to early 1980s New South Wales introduced many new technologies, such as the computer-based management information system with links to all states and to head office (1984). In 1979 Parsons' position was reclassified into the Second Division of the Commonwealth Public Service (subsequently Senior Executive Service).

Following a reorganisation of the Department's management structure in 1982, Parsons was made Assistant Regional Director (Airways) NSW Region, Department of Aviation, Sydney. This gave him responsibility for both the engineering and operational areas of the NSW Region. In this position he was made to confront issues such as aircraft noise, search and rescue, the legal and other aftermath of aircraft fatalities and helicopter transit lanes.

Parsons retired formally in September 1986. In 1987 he acted as a Technical Expert for the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal, which was an agency of the United Nations. In this role he undertook projects in Arab states in the Middle-East, in Pakistan and in North Korea. From July 1989 until September 1991 Parsons undertook a major consultancy with the Federal Airports Corporation (FAC) where he managed the production of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Third Runway at Sydney Airport. He also assisted the Corporation in the preparation of plans for environmental management in Botany Bay related to the impact of the third runway. He continued to advise the FAC on matters related to the third runway and aircraft noise until 1997.

Prepared by Patricia Taaffe, July 2003, from an oral history interview with Kevin Parsons conducted by Margo Beasley on 20.12.99.